

Descriptive Review of the Child:
Descriptive Headingsⁱ

1 . Physical presence and gesture

What is the child's "stance" in the world: How does the child move in the space of the classroom, school, or other setting; is there a particular or typical posture, action, gesture or tone of voice which comes to mind? Does the child "leave their mark?" How?

What are the child's characteristic gestures and expressions: How are these visible in the face and hands, in the attitudes of the body? How do these expressions and gestures vary and in what circumstances (e.g., inside vs. outdoors)? Are there kinds of movement and activity to which the child is given, and others that are difficult to imagine?

What is the child's characteristic level of energy? How would you describe the child's rhythm and pace? How do qualities of energy, rhythm, tempo, movement, and stillness vary, in what circumstances?

How would you describe the child's voice: its rhythm, expressiveness, inflection?

2. Disposition, temperament, emotional tone

How would you describe the child's characteristic temperament and its range (e.g., intense, placid, even/steady, lots of ups and downs, moody, eager, etc.)?

How are feelings expressed? Fully? Rarely? How do you "read" the child's feelings: where and how are they visible?

What is the child's emotional tone or 'color' (vivid, bright, serene, etc.)? Does there seem to be a particular mood or quality of feeling that is characteristic, or are range and variation more noticeable? How does the emotional tone vary with circumstance and setting?

Is there a particular emotional "atmosphere" surrounding the child, or a usual contribution made by the child to the prevailing atmosphere? Can the teacher, other responsible adult, you, or other youngsters "count on" this child to respond in particular ways to particular situations, or to express him/herself in particular ways?

3. Relationships with peers and adults

What is the variety and character of these relationships - e.g., are they constant or predictable, notable for qualities of independence or dependence, initiative or responsiveness, breadth and diversity, depth and exclusivity, etc.? Who is the child attached to, how is attachment (or antipathy) expressed?

Does the child have (or companions, allies, playmates) friends? How would you characterize these attachments? Are they consistent, changeable?

How would you describe the child's casual, day-to-day contact with others? How does that vary?

When there are tensions, how are they visible and how do they get resolved?

Is the child recognized within the group? How is that recognition expressed or manifested by others? Is the child comfortable within the group and how is this visible?

How would you describe the child's relationship to you and to other adults?

4. Activities, interest, preferences

What are the child's preferred activities? When choice is available, what does the child choose to do? What does the child "take to," what engages attention, application, comment, etc..? What seems to matter and to draw out energy, when are qualities of deep involvement, absorption, pleasure, struggle, etc. visible?

Do the preferred activities seem to reflect underlying interests? For example, does drawing or story-writing center on recurrent and related motifs such as superhuman figures, danger and rescue, volcanoes or other large scale events?

How would you describe the child's engagement with projects (e.g., quick, methodical, slapdash, thorough, engaged, committed, casual, determined, curious, etc.)? Is the product itself important to the child? What is the response to mishaps, frustrations?

How would you describe the range of the child's interests? Which interests are intense, passionate?

Are there media that have strong appeal for the child (e.g., paint, blocks, books, woodworking)?

5. Modes of thinking and learning

What is the character of the child's involvement in formal learning situations, in academic work, how does the child respond to "being taught"; how does the child participate in the expectations, conventions, and structures of formal study in the school or other setting? Are there subject areas or parts of the curriculum to which the child is particularly drawn or where the child displays particular power, and vice-versa? How are interests visible in these areas?

How is learning visible as a by-product of other activities?

What is the child's characteristic approach to learning a new subject or process or medium?

In learning, what does the child rely on (e.g., observation, memory, trial and error, steps and sequence, "getting the whole picture, "context" . . .)? How does that learning approach vary from subject to subject? What is the child's characteristic attitude towards inquiry, towards finding out , towards being told, etc.?

What are the child's preferred subjects? What conventions and skills come easily, which are hard? What kinds of learning occasions for pride or satisfaction? What causes dismay or doubt? What seems to get in the way of learning?

How would you characterize the child as a thinker? What ideas and content have appeal? Is there a speculative streak, a problem-solving one, a gift for analogy and metaphor, for synthesis, for image, for reason and logic, for analysis, for insight, for intuition, for the imaginative leap, for fantasy . . . ?

Summing up, based on your observations, how would you characterize the child's strengths? And the child's vulnerabilities?

ⁱ Process developed by Patricia Carini and colleagues at the Prospect Center. @ The Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research, North Bennington, VT.